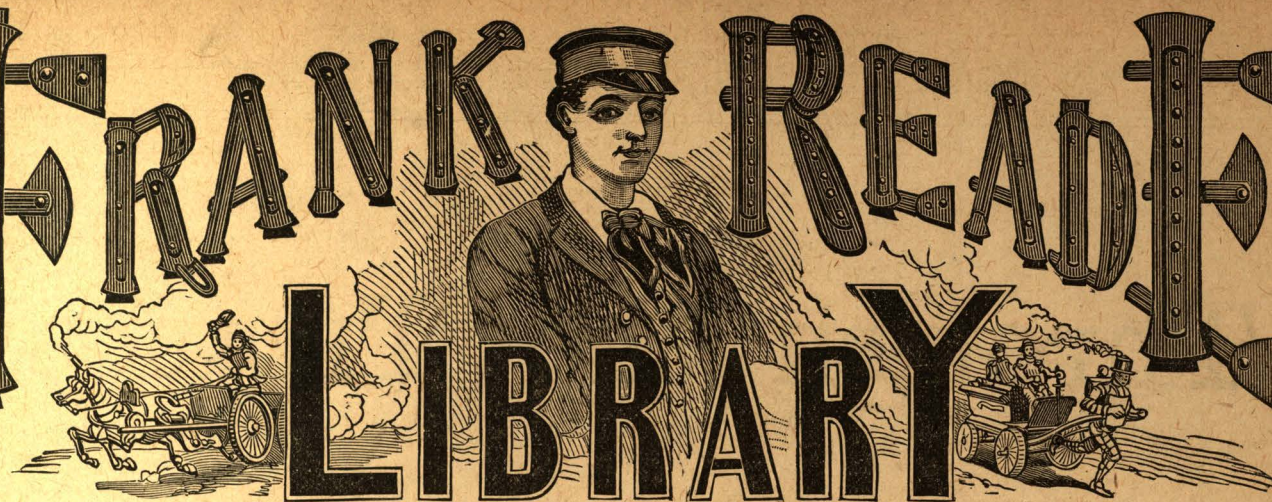


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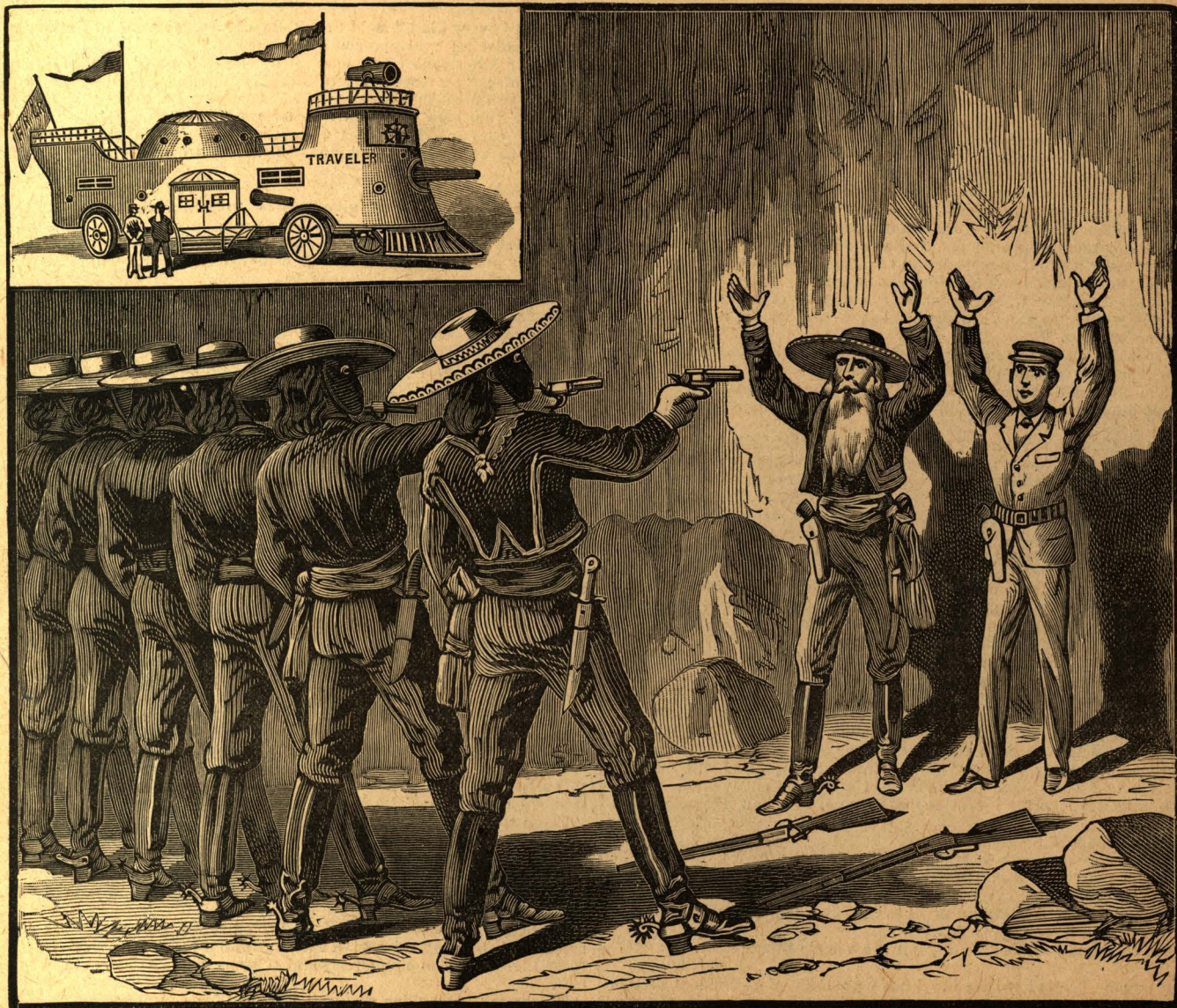
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## Through the Tropics;

or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Adventures  
In the Gran Chaco.

By "NONAME."



In an instant a flood of light illumined the entire pocket. Six masked outlaws with pistols, covering Frank and Don Jose, stood revealed. The game was up. Both Frank and the stock herder saw that resistance was useless. They dropped their weapons and threw up their arms in token of surrender.

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# Through the Tropics;

OR,

## Frank Reade, Jr.'s Adventures in the Gran Chaco.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Magic Island," "The Lost Navigators," "In the Black Zone," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### AT BUENOS AYRES—GETTING READY.

THROUGH the central part of South America and nearly the whole length of the Parana river extends the Grand Chaco.

Every booted and spurred vaquero, every yellow-visaged Gringo, or gaunt-framed mule driver and cattle herder, who hauls up at Ascension after a season's drive, has wonderful tales of adventure to relate while wandering over this mighty expanse of plain and table land.

What the Llano Estacado is to the United States so is the Grand Chaco to the South American. It is a region half explored, half unknown, filled with dangers, dread and mystery.

One day there appeared before Buenos Ayres in the mouth of the Parana river a small steamer flying the American colors. It dropped anchor, and soon a small boat put out and came ashore.

At the quay the U. S. Consul with a couple of Argentine officials were in waiting to greet the newcomers, whose coming it seemed was not unexpected.

From the boat there sprang two men, leaving the light craft to the four seamen who were at the oars. One of these men was Captain Randall, of the Steamer Utopia, and a thorough Yankee.

The other was tall, youthful, but handsome and distinguished looking.

"Ah, Mr. Palmer," said Captain Randall, shaking hands with the consul, "I am glad to meet you again. Not a day older, as I live! Same old six pence I'll wager! Look at me! I've grown as gray as a rat. But allow me—my friend, Mr. Frank Reade, Jr."

"Indeed! I am pleased," said Consul Palmer, as he shook hands with the younger man. "I believe I was at one time fairly well acquainted with your father, Mr. Reade. Always inventing some wonderful thing or other."

"And this is a chip of the old block!" cried Captain Randall, slapping Frank on the shoulder, "only a little more so, as the old saying goes. He double discounts his father as an inventor."

The young inventor blushed.

"I cry you mercy!" he exclaimed, "that is too much. I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Palmer!"

The consul then engaged in a brief conversation with his visitors. All this while the Argentine officials had been standing silently by.

Now, however, Palmer introduced them and the next subject brought forward was the object of their visit to the Argentine.

"You can never guess it," cried Captain Randall, "I will tell you something remarkable. In the hold of my vessel out yonder is one of the most wonderful inventions of the age. It is an Electric Traveler."

Palmer looked puzzled.

"What the deuce is that?" he asked.

"You shall see," declared the enthusiastic captain. "We propose to unload it here, right on this quay. With it, Mr. Reade and his two servants, Barney and Pomp, propose to take a trip through the tropics by way of the Gran Chaco."

"Ah!" exclaimed the consul, "it is a vehicle then?"

"Yes."

"I shall be glad to see it. I have no doubt the president of this republic will give you passports to go where you choose. He is very friendly to Americans."

"That is very kind," said Frank Reade, Jr., with a bow to the Argentine officials; "I appreciate the courtesy."

"Senor Americano need look for no interference," replied one of the officials; "he is welcome to the Argentine."

"But you must first dine with me," declared Palmer. "My house is not far from here, and I have a carriage ready."

Frank exchanged glances with the captain. He was naturally anxious to unload the machine, yet averse to declining the courtesy.

So he said politely:

"I thank you. We can give orders to send a lighter out to the ship and bring the Traveler off while we are absent."

"It shall be done!" cried the captain, who had all the while been extremely anxious for fear Frank would decline. "I will give the order now!"

Accordingly he advanced to the edge of the quay and gave orders to the seamen. They rowed away to the ship, and the party entered a carriage near and were driven to the consul's house.

Barney and Pomp, a genial Irishman and a jolly negro, were on board the Utopia, and hastened to obey Frank's orders with alacrity.

A lighter was later towed alongside, and preparations were made to remove the sections of the machine to the wharf.

It did not take the hardy roustabouts long to do this, Barney and Pomp overseeing the job. Then the Traveler was conveyed to the quay.

Here Barney and Pomp directed the putting together of the machine, and also had the stores and equipments placed on board. And this is a fitting time to take a brief look at the Traveler.

Frank Reade, Jr.'s idea in constructing the Traveler was to build a machine that would be light, yet strong and bullet-proof, and capable of affording living quarters for the travelers while journeying through wild and dangerous parts of the world.

The machine must be capable as he well knew of traveling over rough ground, as well as smooth plain, of threading jungles and fording swift rivers. For all these contingencies he had provided.

The body of the Traveler was long and narrow, and made of bullet proof, though thin steel. It had plate glass windows and a door protected with wire netting. The lower part of this body of the carriage contained several compartments, fitted up respectively for living room and staterooms with a storeroom-engine room and pilot house.

Of course the motive power was electricity, the storage of which was a secret of Frank's. The machinery was light, but powerful and connected with the forward axle of the vehicle.

There was an upper deck with brass guard rails, and a dome with sky light furnished light for those within. Over the pilot-house was an electric search-light of tremendous power and range.

The Traveler was equipped with three dynamite guns. These were but pneumatic tubes of thin steel, the projectiles or shell being impelled with compressed air.

These guns were fearful deadly. A shell sent from one of them was capable of blowing things to atoms within a large radius. Besides these there was also a small arsenal of arms in the cabin of the Traveler.

Therefore the machine was well equipped for a perilous journey in a foreign land.

The running gear of the Traveler was light but strong. The wheels had rubber tires like those of a bicycle, so that great speed could be gained, even over a poor road. But, even if overtaken in a rough tract of country by a foe, a most valiant defense could be made by the inmates of the vehicle.

For cutting its way through heavily grassed pampas or thick jungles, the machine was equipped with sharp knives which could be fastened to the hubs of the wheels and also the forward axle. These, revolving, would easily cut down any ordinary material in the way.

For fording streams or crossing any small body of water there were paddles, which could be fastened upon the wheels, the forward axle being manipulated for steering just as on the land. The Traveler was water-tight in her lower part and made quite seaworthy.

There were many minor details about the machine which we will not give attention to just now, but leave to future reference in the course of the story.

It was some hours before Frank and Captain Randall returned from the dinner at Consul Palmer's house. They reached the quay to find the Traveler all set up and equipped for the start.

It was surrounded by a curious crowd of interested onlookers, who had never seen anything like it before.

A number of Buenos Ayres officials were with the party, and Frank for the sake of diplomacy took them aboard the vehicle. They examined it with interest.

And not one in the party but declared it superior to any railway coach, and one of the Gringos wanted the privilege of accompanying the party.

"I have lots of cattle in the Chaco," he declared. "I can help you, senors, and show you the points of interest if you will allow me to join your party."

Of course Frank evaded the proposition and finally politely declined much to the disappointment of the Gringo. Captain Randall was now ready to return to his vessel.

"I am going to round the Horn and visit Valparaiso," he declared; "if you can give me an idea as to what time you will return to meet me here, I would like it, Mr. Reade."

Frank was thoughtful a moment.

"I have been considering the matter," he declared, "and I have decided not to return to Buenos Ayres as we talked of in the first place."

The captain was astonished.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Not return to Buenos Ayres? Where then shall I meet you?"

"Let it be at Rio de Janeiro," replied Frank; "after traversing the Grand Chaco it seems to me that it would be much nearer to cut across the country to that point than to return here."

"Why, so it would!"

"Very good; if you will meet me in Rio in three months from now, I shall be very glad."

The captain bowed.

"It shall be so," he replied. "I wish you good luck and a pleasant journey through the tropics."

"Thank you!"

They shook hands warmly.

Then Captain Randall leaped into his boat, and was rowed away to his ship. Frank saw him depart with momentary sensations of a thrilling sort.

He was now face to face with the great project which he had undertaken. The mighty wilderness, with its unknown perils and uncertainties, was before him.

For a moment he experienced a faint regret—a sort of homesick sensation, then he smiled at his weakness.

"All aboard!" he said to Barney and Pomp.

"All roight, sor!" cried the Celt.

"We've done ready, sah!" declared Pomp.

Both lively fellows scrambled aboard the vehicle. Frank was about to follow them when a surprising thing happened.

Down the narrow street leading to the quay there came a party of horsemen madly riding.

They were dressed in the picturesque garb of stock herders, and the foremost was a tall, powerful-framed man of commanding appearance, with a flowing white beard and hair, which made him look really patriarchal.

He flung his horse upon its haunches, and leaped from the saddle just in front of Frank. Doffing his broad sombrero, he made a low bow.

"Buenos senor," he said, in a rich mellow voice, "Don Jose Gonsalvo at your service. I am, indeed, fortunate to find you here!"

Frank was at a loss to understand what the tall Gringo could want with him, but he made reply:

"I am glad to meet you, senor. What favor can I render you?"

"Ah, then, you will render me a favor, senor," cried the aged herder, impulsively. "Santa Maria bless you. The Americano has a heart, and will listen to the sad story of a breaved father."

Frank began to see through the game now. This man had come to him to ask some service, just what it was not easy to guess. Hundreds of others had done the same thing before the young inventor had left America, and had he granted all their requests, he would have had a life occupation on his hands.

The result had been a positive declination of all requests. An annoyed look for a moment shone in Frank's eyes.

It was upon his lips to tell the aged senor that it would be impossible for him to listen to any proposition. But he hesitated.

A sweeping glance showed him that this man was deeply in earnest, and that some great trouble was upon him.

His patrician features were partly shadowed by the richly-braided sombrero. His dress throughout showed him a man of wealth and distinction. It was no light matter which had brought him here as a supplicant.

So Frank said:

"What is your story, senor?"

"You shall hear it," replied the stock herder, with a ring of pathos in his voice, "though it tears my heart strings to recall it."

"I am Jose Gonsalvo, and in all the Chaco there are no larger or finer herds than mine. My hacienda is deep in the heart of the richest grazing, and until a few weeks since it has been a haven of comfort, joy and brightness to me.

"But alas! in an evil hour, a fiend in human shape has robbed it of that light, which was to me dearer than life. Jesu, pity! do not turn coldly from a sorrowing father. My Muriel, my own child, the image of my dead Isabella, was foully torn from my bosom, and from my life.

"In my absence on the range, Red Murillo, the greatest wretch among the outlaws of the Chaco, descended upon my hacienda, with his vile band, and after looting it, carried away my Muriel, my darling angel daughter. Long and hard I have ridden with my brave friends at my back. Long have I striven to track the guilty wretch, but in vain.

"He has eluded me, and I am in despair. But my friend, the Alcalde, Don Ventura, has told me of you and your wonderful traveling wagon with its powerful guns. So Senor, I have hastened hither in all my despair to beg of you aid in my sorrowing quest. The Americano has a heart and he will not turn coldly from the father who seeks to rescue his daughter from the power of villains. The Americano is noble and chivalrous. He will aid me!"

After this thrilling narrative and pathetic appeal Don Jose stood with his burning gaze fixed upon the young inventor. For a moment Frank was silent.

The passionate appeal had not been without its effect upon him. But he hesitated.

"Yours is a sad story, senor," he said; "but is it possible, think you, for me to give you aid?"

"Ay, senor!" replied Gonsalvo eagerly. "You can fight a legion of the outlaws with your powerful guns; you can travel where horses and men cannot; yours is the power!"

Frank did not attempt to deny this. He knew that it was largely true.

After all, what better could he do than undertake this chivalrous as well as humane mission? It need not interfere with necessary exploration. In fact, it was adventure he was seeking.

But his mind was already made up. He extended his hand to the stock-herder and said in excellent Spanish:

"I will do all I can to help you rescue your daughter, senor."

The agonized parent was profuse in his expressions of delight. He could hardly find words to express his gratitude.

By this time the story had spread through the crowd. All had heard of Red Murillo, and the affliction of Don Jose appealed to their sympathies.

They swung their hats and cheered the Americanos. Frank modestly bowed in acknowledgment and sprang aboard the Traveler.

Barney opened the motor lever and the wheels began to turn. Up the street of the city the wonderful electric vehicle ran.

And the crowd cheered madly, while Don Jose and his cavalcade galloped on behind. Thus they passed through Buenos Ayres and into the open country.

The great trip through the Tropics was well begun, and already exciting adventure and thrilling incident was promised.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE GRAN CHACO—THE PAMPAS FIRE.

Now with the reader's kind permission we will transpose the scene of our story to the mighty depths of the Gran Chaco.

Suffice it to say that, leaving Buenos Ayres, the Traveler with Gonsalvo and his men had journeyed rapidly into the wilderness. So far no incident worthy of note had occurred.

But now that they were deep in the heart of the Chaco, the scene began to change.

The Traveler could speed rapidly over the hard floor of the plain, and would have left Gonsalvo and his men far behind had Frank seen fit to do so. But the party kept together, and steadily they worked their way into the wilderness.

Don Gonsalvo affirmed that the stronghold of Murillo would be found far up in the wilderness, near the Bermejo river.

Here the country was rough and broken and afforded deep canyons and rocky fastnesses. Here Murillo had his headquarters in an almost inaccessible region from which he descended at suitable times to rob, pillage and murder. He was the terror of the law abiding herders of the Chaco.

So the course had been made steadily toward the Bermejo River. Days passed, and still the party kept booming ahead.

They encountered many herds of cattle, being rounded up by the herders, and frequently found rough habitations in the wilds.

Sometimes information was gained regarding Murillo, but he was always represented as being at Bermejo; so they kept on.

"Begorra, it's the wildest part av the wurruil I iver was in!"

declared Barney, as they rolled on over plain and through jungle and woods. "Shure, Africky don't howld a candle to it."

"Or Ireland either, fo' dat," declared Pomp, with an innocent air.

Barney turned sharp about.

"Phwat's that yez say, sor?" he demanded, sharply.

"A'right, sah," said Pomp, blandly.

The Celt glared at the coon. It was about time for them to have the customary ruction. This was a peculiarity of their friendship that one was always engaged in nagging the other.

There was nothing they enjoyed more than a rough and tumble wrestle or a wrangle of some sort. Yet they were the warmest of friends.

There was nothing Barney would resent quicker than an allusion to his native isle. Like all true born Hibernians, he was loyal to his fatherland.

So he sidled up to Pomp with a sinister glare in his eyes.

"No, it ain't all roight, me foine frind!" he declared. "Yez meant that fer an attack upon me native sod, an' be me sowl I'll not take the insult! Ireland, sor, is a foine intelligint country, an' yez can't deny it!"

"Huh!" ejaculated Pomp; "yo' jes' wants to pick up a row, does yo'? Wha' did I say dat youse mad at?"

"Yez called Ireland a wilderness, sor! An' it's a foiner country than yure ancisters cum from. Shure the O'Sheas are descended from—"

"Rats!" exclaimed Pomp. "Yo' kain't talk 'bout nuffin' but yo' ancestors. How does I know yo' eber had enny?"

"Whurroo!" howled the indignant Celt, "phwat do yez take me fer, yez black son av an ape? Shure, that's an insult no thrue Irishman kin iver overlook!"

With which he threw out one foot and Pomp sat down on the deck of the Traveler very hard. This at once set the ball rolling.

The coon sprang up with blood in his eyes. He started for the Celt shaking his head like a mad bull.

"Look out dar fo' trubble!" he yelled. "I'se gwine to fix yo' fo' dat!"

Barney made a whack at the coon, but missed him. The next moment Pomp's head took him in the stomach like a battering ram.

He sat down hard on the deck. The darky stumbled over him, and they clirched.

Then followed a desperate struggle. They were well matched.

They fought like tigers until so exhausted that they were finally compelled to quit. Then they heard Frank coming out of the pilot house.

"Whisht!" cried the Celt, "there cums Mither Frank."

"Yo' am right."

"Will yez apologize?"

"No, sah!"

"Thin be jabers, I'll cum square wld yez another toime!"

"Yo' kain't do it!"

Then away they scrambled to their respective quarters, and Frank found them industriously at work when he appeared on the scene.

Frank had come out of the pilot-house for a purpose. They had been for some hours traversing a heavily-grassed plain.

Far away to the northward he had spied a long column of smoke, which had suddenly seemed to rise up out of the plain.

After studying it for some while a thrilling conviction dawned upon him. It, of course, meant that somewhere in that quarter there was a fire.

What if the Pampas were afire and it should swoop down in their direction. They were many miles from water, open ground, and could not fail to be overtaken.

"By Jove!" mnttered the young inventor, "that is hardly a pleasant thing to think of. I believe I'll have a word with Don Jose and see what he thinks of it."

So as he appeared on the deck Barney and Pomp were industriously engaged and there was no visible trace of their recent affair.

"Barney," said Frank, "go into the pilot-house and steer the Traveler for awhile. I want to speak with Don Jose."

"All roight, sor!" replied the Celt.

But even as Frank reached the rail he saw the stock-herder come dashing excitedly up on his horse. His manner was extremely excited.

"Ah, Senor Reade," he cried in Spanish, "do you see that distant cloud of smoke?"

"I do, Don Jose," replied Frank, "and I was just about to call your attention to it. Do you think it means anything serious?"

"Oh indeed, yes, Senor!" replied the stock-herder, "it can mean only one thing."

"What is that?"

"Death, unless we can outrun the flames!"

Frank shivered.

"Do you think the fire was set with reference to us?" he asked.

"Si, senor," replied Don Jose, "there is no doubt of it."

"Then—we must be near the rendezvous of Murillo."

"Not but another day's journey."

"But how would Murillo know that we were coming to attack him?" Don Jose laughed harshly.

"Ah, senor," he replied, "the news left Buenos Ayres before we did. The spies and colleagues of Murillo are everywhere. It is safe to say that word reached him a full day since."

"And he has been watching for us ever since?"

"Exactly, senor."

"He has faithful minions then. But we must take measures to avert this impending catastrophe at once. Have you any plan, senor?"

"Only to flee from the fire," replied Don Jose. "The wind is from the north, and that will bring it full down upon us. Therefore, our best way is to make for the west and get beyond its line."

Frank looked dubious.

"Its line may spread in that direction," he declared. "What should we do then?"

"We must die!" replied the herder, with apparent resignation.

"I am not ready to do that as yet," declared Frank. "We might set a counter fire."

But Don Jose shook his head.

"It would surround us," he declared; "the pampas will burn against the wind as well as with it."

"Then our only course is to make a race for it."

"Si, senor."

Now Frank saw at once how truly desperate the situation was. On a level, smooth plain he could have outrun the fire.

But the machine could maintain only a limited rate of speed through the tall grass. The scythe blades on the hubs could cut it, but this very act was an impediment to speed.

However, according to Don Jose's views, there was no choice. They could only run for it.

With this conviction Frank lost no time. He changed the course of the vehicle to the west and was about to crowd on all speed, when suddenly Gonsalvo's voice was heard again.

"Jesu pity! We are lost!"

"Eh?" cried Frank, springing out on deck. "What is the matter now?"

"See, Senor!" cried the Don, pointing to the west.

A long line of smoke at right angles with the northern line was seen. The plain had been fired in that quarter.

All was easy to see.

The villains sought to make a circle of fire about the invaders and burn them up like rats in a trap.

"God help us!" exclaimed Frank, "that may mean death to us!"

By this time Barney and Pomp had reached an understanding of the situation. They were horrified.

"Shure Mither Frank," cried Barney. "Phwy not go back the way we came, sor?"

"We may have to," declared Frank, "but we will be apt to be run down by the fire, being in its path. If we could go to the east we might perhaps run beyond its line."

Then Frank picked up his glass and scanned the eastern horizon. As he did so he gave a great cry.

There extended for miles a long body of water, probably a lake. The outlaws had deemed this as serious an obstacle as the fire.

But Frank did not.

To him it was an avenue of escape. He shouted to Gonsalvo.

"To the east!" he cried; "there we can escape!"

But the herder answered:

"We shall plunge into a lake and be drowned, senor!"

"Not much!" replied Frank. "I'll show you how to avoid that. Forward all!"

With which he gave Barney a signal, and the machine was off. Away it went at fearful speed.

Crashing through the pampas grass, it made a path in which the horses were easily able to follow.

By this time a great sheet of flame had risen above the smoke on the horizon line and was sweeping across the plain with race-horse speed.

It spread along the west and to the south. Its passage was fierce and furious.

The adventurers knew that to be overtaken in that holocaust meant an awful death. So every nerve was strained to reach the lake.

The scene now became appalling.

The flame and smoke mounted to the very zenith and shut out the light of the sun. It seemed as if the fleeing men would surely be swept into that yawping, fiery mass.

But the shimmering waters of the lake were now near at hand.

On and on rushed the machine. Just before reaching the water a strip of smooth plain was crossed.

Here the Traveler fairly flew and a few moments later reached the sand. Frank did not hesitate to run her into the water.

Then he threw out the paddle wheels. But Gonsalvo and his men paused at the water's edge.

The flames were now not a mile distant. Their heat was even at this distance something appalling.

There was no time to lose. Frank shouted to the herders to swim their horses out to the machine.

They at once plunged into the water and obeyed. The hardy little Argentine horses could swim like ducks, and easily carried their riders out to the Traveler.

Then the herders climbed out upon the machine's deck, holding the bridle reins of their horses. Frank sent the machine further out into the lake.

The horses swam easily behind. They could keep afloat a long while, but it was hardly likely that this would be found necessary.

For a fire like that of the pampas burns so swiftly that it is soon burned out, and this proved to be the case.

A few moments later it swept down to the water's edge.

There was a great wave of smoke and flame, which went sweeping across the water; then it gradually lifted.

The blackened cinder strewn expanse reached as far as the eye could see. It required but a few moments for Frank to turn the Traveler shoreward.

And a few minutes later, machine, men, horses and all emerged from their watery bath and started away once more across the plain, which now presented a vastly changed appearance.

And as they went on, suddenly a cavalcade of horsemen was espied in the distance. A great shout went up.

Gonsalvo came riding alongside the Traveler excitedly.

"It is Murillo and his gang," he cried, "they have come out to make sure that the fire destroyed us. Oh, if we could only catch them!"

Frank's eyes flashed.

He studied the distant body of horsemen a moment with his glass, then he made a swift resolution.

"Follow on as you can, Don Jose!" he cried; "I am going ahead in pursuit."

"Good, senor! May good fortune go with you!"

And Frank sprung into the pilot-house and threw the lever wide open. Away went the Traveler.

But the wily outlaw chief had espied the machine. He saw it coming, and away sped his horses like frightened rabbits over the burned plain.

But Frank knew that on smooth ground he could outrun any horse that ever stood on hoofs. The Traveler on a smooth surface could run close to a mile per minute.

So it can be understood that the outlaws had little to spare. Away they went at full speed.

But the machine gained so rapidly that their countenances could be plainly distinguished. Thus far Frank had remained at the switch board.

But now he called Barney to the post, and sped quickly down to the gun room.

He trained one of the dynamite guns, and placed a shell in the breech. At that moment, he could, with a single shot, have swept the whole score of outlaws from existence.

He lived to regret later on that he had not done so. But Frank was always averse to taking human life.

His purpose was to frighten the villains into a surrender. If he could capture Murillo, he felt sure that he could effect an exchange for the captive girl.

So he trained the electric gun to throw a shell far over the heads of the fleeing ruffians and explode it in front of them.

This he reckoned would check them and perhaps frighten them into making terms. So he trained the gun and pressed the electric button.

There was a hiss and a slight recoil. Then a distant thunderous explosion rent the air.

A great cloud of debris rose fifty feet in the air at the spot where the shell struck. But it had little effect upon the outlaws.

They turned their horses sharply to the left and suddenly vanished. It was as if the earth had completely swallowed them up, which in very fact it had.

Barney ran the machine a full quarter of a mile beyond before he could stop it.

Then as it was turned about the adventurers beheld an astonishing fact. It put a new face upon matters and explained a deep mystery.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A MIDNIGHT EXPEDITION—PRISONERS.

WHEN the outlaws turned so obliquely to the left they descended into a deep depression in the ground. It covered full half an acre.

And it constituted really the entrance to a deep cave which extended down into the earth an unknown distance.

They vanished as if by magic into this cave.

The Traveler halted upon the verge of the depression. Frank studied the situation with surprise.

"Well, I am beat!" he declared, in amazement. "This outvies anything I ever saw or heard of. What a wonderful freak of Nature!"

For he saw at once that the cavern was the work of Nature, and not human hands. It could be very readily understood when one cast a look to the north.

For distant but a mile was a range of rocky hills. Doubtless this cavern extended far beneath them.

At all events it had offered the outlaws a very good avenue of escape. They had made good use of it.

Don Jose and his men were far in the distance. For a few moments Frank was undecided how to act.

The entrance to the cavern was small. The horses could go in easily enough in single file.

But Frank saw at once that it would be quite out of the question to follow with the Traveler.

However, for revenge, and partly for the purpose of entrapping the villains, he sent a dynamite shell into the place.

It exploded with frightful effect, completely closing up the entrance with fallen stone.

"If they come out," muttered Frank, "it must be by some other entrance."

Then he waited the coming of Don Jose. The stock herder was much excited when he heard all.

"By the saints!" he cried, "we have found the den of the tiger by the best of luck! Now we must smoke him out!"

"Can you tell how we shall do that?" asked Frank.

Don Jose was fain to confess that he could not, but he suggested

at once invading the hills and looking for the other entrance to the cave if such existed.

Frank agreed to this and they set forth. It did not take long to reach the hills, it being scarcely a mile.

Here they found themselves among the greatest aggregation of rocks which any of them had ever seen. They were in all sizes, shapes and varieties.

But by this time the sun had set in the west and the incidents of the day were over.

As all were weary and little could be done that night, it was proposed to camp where they were and await the coming of another day.

This was agreeable to all and accordingly Don Jose's men corralled their horses and made a roaring fire.

There was a good supply of llama meat which they roasted over the hot coals and thus made a good meal. Don Jose dined with Frank on board the Traveler.

The two men retired to the cabin to consult plans for the morrow. Seated at a table, Frank made a map of the route they had followed thus far.

"We have tracked the villains to their lair, senor," said Frank; "but there is one thing we have not accomplished."

"Ah, senor?"

"We have learned little or nothing of the whereabouts of your daughter. We do not even know that she is yet alive."

The stock herder nodded with a ghastly smile.

"Si, senor," he agreed; "that is too true. But I live in hopes."

"That is wise. Now I have a plan."

Don Jose looked eagerly at Frank.

"You are a man of resource," he said. "You always have a plan."

"I suggest," said Frank slowly, "that we wait until the camp has quieted down, say near midnight. We will say nothing to anyone, but you and I, well armed, can steal out on an exploring tour. If we could possibly find our way into the outlaws' stronghold we would gain much. Or maybe we could find some clew. That would repay us."

Don Jose gave a little gasp and clutched Frank's arm.

"That very plan was mine," he said.

"Yours?"

"Yes, but I was going forth alone. I feared that you might not sanction the move. But I am glad that you do!"

"Then it is settled," said Frank. "We will go forth at midnight!"

To guard against an attack or being taken by surprise the search-light was turned on and made the vicinity as plain as day for a great distance about.

The stock herders were disposed to be jovial, and indeed so were Barney and Pomp.

In the course of the evening the two jokers joined the circle about the camp-fire and entertained them with jolly jokes and repartee.

Then Barney brought out his Irish fiddle and played lively Hibernian airs and sang rollicking songs without end, being wildly applauded by the gaucheros.

Pomp did his little turn also, producing his banjo and contributing some plantation melodies such as were new and enjoyable to the company present.

Thus the evening passed.

Wherever the outlaws were they did not attempt an attack, and nothing was seen of them. About eleven o'clock most of the party rolled themselves up in their blankets and sought sleep.

This was Frank's and Don Jose's opportunity. At an unobserved moment, and armed to the teeth, they silently made their way out of the camp.

Passing the guard line, they entered the shadows and were in the wilds of the region. Great ledges and peaks towered about them like the topography of an Inferno.

Silently they glided on in the darkness until the camp was left far behind. Then they listened and watched for some sign of the foe.

Like shadows they flitted from one point to another.

But if the outlaws were hovering in the vicinity, they were adroit enough to make it almost impossible to detect their presence.

Neither Frank nor Don Jose had any doubt as to their ability to find their way back to the camp, for the reflection of the search-light against the sky was the best sort of a guide.

"It's very strange that we can find no sign of them, senor," whispered Don Jose. "Murillo is wily indeed, but that none of his scouts are out seems indeed odd."

"That is true," agreed Frank; "but we may stumble upon them yet. It is well to proceed with great care. Now where think you can we find the entrance to his stronghold?"

"Ah, that's a question I cannot answer, senor," replied Don Jose; "yet it is somewhere in this region. Ah!"

The stock herder gripped Frank's arm, and at that moment both heard a peculiar, yet recognizable sound.

It was the regular though muffled thud of horses' feet just beyond a ridge of rock not more than one hundred yards away.

In an instant the two scouts were on the alert. One moment only they hesitated.

Then, with Frank leading the way, they crossed the intervening space, and in the dark shadows awaited the coming of the unknown horsemen.

That it was Murillo or some of his men they did not doubt. Nor had they long to wait.

Up a little slope they came in single file. The foremost rider was tall and sat very straight in the saddle.

"That is Murillo," whispered Don Jose, raising his rifle; "there is no better chance to rid the world of the ruffian!"

But Frank gripped his arm.

"Hold!" he whispered, sternly. "You must not! It would mean defeat!"

Thus adjured the stock herder lowered his rifle. Within a few yards of the concealed men the outlaws passed.

In single file and silently they passed by and away among the shadows. When the last man had passed Frank gripped his companion's arm.

"Come," he said, "let us go along. We must follow them."

Don Jose did not demur and silently followed Frank. They kept at a safe distance in the rear of the horsemen.

Among the crags and huge ledges the cavalcade wound its way. For an hour they traveled slowly thus.

Frank knew well enough that they were traveling a long distance. But he never once thought of abandoning the pursuit.

At length the horsemen wound their way down into a little pocket in the hills. Then there was a brief halt.

Frank and Don Jose shrank back into the shadows. The scuffling of horses' hoofs upon shaly ground was heard for a few moments, then all was silence.

For some minutes the two men crouched there, listening with all their ears for some further sound.

But none came.

What did it mean?

"Where are they?" finally whispered Frank.

"I can see nothing of them," declared Don Jose.

"If they are there, certainly they are keeping very quiet."

"Perhaps they suspect us?"

"It is possible!"

And this conclusion induced the two watchers to shrink deeper into the shadows and keep more quiet than ever. Thus a long time passed.

Frank was puzzled.

There certainly ought to have been some sound come from the cavalcade in all this time. The champing of bits, the creaking of saddles, all had ceased.

Then a conviction dawned upon the young inventor that they were certainly outwitted.

The outlaws had gone on and left them, or outwitted them in some way.

"Confound my stupidity!" muttered Frank, "I should have known better than this. Come, Don Jose, we must overtake them!"

With which Frank glided out of his covert. He looked for the continuance of the path. But he was met with a dampening surprise.

There was no such thing. The defile came to an end here. The pocket was walled in upon three sides to the height of fully a hundred feet.

The cavalcade could not have gone over this nor apparently through it, yet they had disappeared.

Astonished the two men looked at each other in the dim light.

"Santa Maria!" exclaimed Don Jose, "he is aided by the devil!"

"Indeed, it is very strange," agreed Frank. "What can it mean?"

Then he proceeded to examine the smooth, unbroken walls of the pocket. There was nothing to show that any part of it was removable or that any passage beyond existed.

It was a mystery.

Frank was wholly at a loss for an explanation. Never in his life had he met with a stranger circumstance.

Where had the outlaws gone so suddenly and so mysteriously? It was all very inexplicable.

So interested were the two men that they never once thought of any possible risk or peril in their position.

Standing in the pocket they were in quite an exposed position. But this fact was presently called to their minds in a startling manner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank gave a thrilled start and Don Jose did the same. They sprang into the deeper shadows.

"What was that?" he whispered.

"I don't know!"

Don Jose meant that he did not know the meaning of the hysterical, ironical laugh, which seemed scarcely human, and which had woke the echoes of the place.

The two startled men crouched against the rocky wall in a thrill of apprehension. Don Jose had thought of proposing retreat, when Frank gripped his arm.

"Sh! keep quiet on your life!"

And then the two crouching men saw that a half dozen men were in the pocket; where they had come from so suddenly, was most inexplicable.

But there they were, dark, shadowy forms. Frank and Don Jose had not as yet believed that their presence was suspected.

But now, a harsh rasping voice broke the stillness:

"Now, give us the light!"

In an instant a flood of light illumined the entire pocket. Six masked outlaws, with pistols covering Frank and Don Jose, stood revealed.

The game was up.

Both Frank and the stock herder saw that resistance was useless. They dropped their weapons and threw up their arms in token of surrender.

It was a picture worthy of an artist. There against the wall of the pocket, in the strange white light which illumined the place, stood the two men, covered by the weapons of the six masked outlaws.

Murillo himself it was who had given the order, and he now advanced and confronted the two prisoners.

"Ah, senors!" he exclaimed with a mocking, jeering laugh, "you sought to follow the fox into his hole, did you? But the fox's scent was too keen. No man can track Murillo and live to tell of it. You know your fate."

"We ask no quarter," said Frank calmly. "We have fallen into the hands of a cutthroat and look for no mercy."

"Caramba, senor!" cried the outlaw chief, "this is no time for insult!"

"As well die for that as aught else," retorted Frank.

Murillo leaned forward and stared into Frank's face.

"Ah, I see!" he muttered. "You are not one of our countrymen. A foreigner, eh? Per Christo! an American!"

"You have guessed aright."

"What then do you here? Why do you seek to make war upon me?"

"That motive which impels an honest man to further the ends of justice!"

"Ah, a sharp answer truly. We shall test your bravado further presently. And this man—Santa Maria!"

The outlaw chief recoiled as he glanced into the white stern face of Don Jose.

"Gonsalvo!" he gasped. "And here! By my soul, what do you here, sire?"

"It is well for you to ask that question, Murillo!" replied the stock herder, sternly; "what is more powerful than the love of a father for his child?"

The outlaw's face darkened.

"So you fancy that I have carried off the beautiful Muriel?" he said, with a light laugh.

"I know it, you wretch!"

"And you have come here thinking to effect her rescue?"

"I have!"

"Well," sneered the villain, "you have made a pretty mess of it. What do you think of your chances?"

"Providence will aid me!"

"We shall see how far!" said the outlaw. "Juan, you Castello dogs, bind the prisoners and take them to the last cavern. Hold strong guard over them there until you have further orders from me!"

Two of the Argentine outlaws advanced and laid hands upon the prisoners.

In a trice they were bound and blindfolded. Then they were led away, they knew not where, but after much journeying when the bandages were removed from their eyes they saw that they were in a stone chamber with an iron door.

And here they were left, the door being barred on the outside.

It was some while before either could sufficiently recover his scattered senses to talk.

Then Frank declared:

"I am certain of one thing, Don Jose."

"Ah!" exclaimed the stock herder.

"We have made fools of ourselves."

"How so, senor?"

"Have we not? It would have been more sensible to have remained on board the Traveler and kept our necks out of this noose. We will be sure to be assassinated and we have and can render no assistance whatever to your daughter."

"There may be a chance of rescue."

"It is slight."

Thus discussing their folly, the two prisoners passed the night. When daylight came, Frank saw a small grated window in the further wall of the cell.

Through it the sunlight was streaming. He climbed up and looked out upon a strange scene.

He looked down the face of a mighty cliff, with a deep defile and swirling stream far below. Their prison chamber was a cavern cell, and the window was cut through its face.

But as Frank looked over the rugged panorama before him, a startling sound came to his ears.

It was the distant rattle of firearms. He gave a sharp cry.

"Did you hear that, Don Jose?"

"Ay," replied the stock herder. "What do you make of it?"

"Only one thing is possible. The wretches have attacked the camp. It may be that they have surprised our friends and will annihilate them."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FIGHT WITH THE OUTLAWS.

BARNEY and Pomp had neither of them remained on guard that night, for the picket line established by the stock herders had been deemed sufficient.

But for some reason or other the Celt could not sleep.

At an early hour he arose and went out on deck. He lighted his duddan and sat down by the rail to enjoy a smoke.

At the moment he did not for a moment dream but that Frank and Don Jose were in their bunks below decks. Had he known that they were not he would have acted differently.

The sun began to peep above the hilltops before the camp began to arouse itself; then the pickets came in for relief, and all became active.

Pomp came on deck, and spying Barney, cried:

"I say, I'ish, wha' made yo' git up so early, eh?"  
 "Shure, I ouldn't slape fer the shuorin' av yez!" declared Barney, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Huh! mebbe dat was de some reason wha' Marse Frank an' Marse Gonsalbo get up too."

Barney opened his eyes.

"Phwat's that yez say? Misther Frank ain't up yet, nor the dago either."

"Huh! Marse Gonsalbo ain' no dago. He bery fine gen'leman, sah. Dey am up long ago I tell yo'?"

"Bejabers, thin it must have been mighty airy," cried Barney in surprise. "Shure I ain't seen 'em nor any sign av thim."

"I done reckon yo' finks yo' sees eberyting. If yo' don' believe wha' I say, yo' jes' go down dere in dere staterooms an' see fo' yo'se'f!"

Barney sprang up with a sudden exclamation. A distant startling sound came to the hearing of both.

It was a rifle shot.

It was followed by another and another. Then into the camp there came rushing one of the pickets.

"We are attacked, senors!" he cried in Spanish, "to arms! Where is Don Jose?"

In an instant the camp was in an uproar.

But Don Jose was nowhere to be found. Nor could Barney and Pomp find a trace of Frank Reade, Jr.

They were both mysteriously absent. And the camp was attacked by the outlaws. What was to be done in the absence of the leaders?

Of course there seemed but one thing to do, and that was to make a defense. But it could be seen that without a head, there was danger of a panic among the herders.

Barney and Pomp realized this and did all they could to establish a system. But as neither of them could speak Spanish they were handicapped.

The pickets were being driven in by the attacking outlaws. The fight would soon be general.

But Barney blinked his eyes and adjusting one of the dynamite guns, said:

"Begorra, if I get at thim wid this, it'll be an unlucky thing that they iver tried such a game, you bet."

All that could be done therefore was to wait for the conflict to come to close quarters. This bade fair to be the case very speedily.

The firing momentarily drew nearer. The herders, ensconced behind rocks, made a gallant defense.

It chafed Barney and Pomp to lie inactive all this while, and finally the Celt declared:

"Shure we haven't any orders from Misther Frank, but it's me belief that av he was here he'd move forward an' ingage the inemy."

"I reckon you'se right, chile, an' I backs yo' up," agreed Pomp.

"Thin here's at thim!"

Barney sent the machine forward to a higher position. From this point the line of the outlaws' attack could be seen by the smoke from their rifles.

They were safely ensconced behind ledges and bowlders, as were the herders. It was a desultory battle.

And Barney saw that it would be almost a waste of ammunition to attempt to drive them back with dynamite.

He could no doubt blow many of the ledges to powder, but this would only put the foe on their guard and do them little harm.

So he desisted from firing. If they should once venture a charge, or show themselves in the open woe unto them.

So the two defenders of the Traveler contented themselves with rifle practice as were the herders. Woe to the outlaw who unwittingly showed his head.

Thus for an hour the battle was waged with no special advantage to either side. And all the while everybody was wondering what had become of the two leaders, Frank Reade, Jr., and Don Jose.

The outlaws far outnumbered the herders, and began to draw their lines closer. This made the fight hotter.

It also increased the chances for Barney to make use of his dynamite guns. For this he was waiting patiently.

"Be me sowl, av I kin jest git wan shot at thim," he muttered, "shure I'll blow ivery wan av thim into eternity."

But the outlaws appeared elusive, and though they were momentarily contracting their lines they never presented a good target.

Moreover their sharpshooting was beginning to tell upon the herders. The latter had already lost a half dozen men.

The outlook was serious, inasmuch as Murillo's men seemed to be working around to the rear and gradually surrounding the party. The herders grew anxious.

And yet neither Frank Reade, Jr., nor Don Jose put in an appearance. What could it mean?

Had they been present the result of the conflict could not have been long in doubt, for all that the herders needed was a fresh supply of confidence.

Meanwhile Barney and Pomp chafed at their own impatience, and finally the Celt said desperately:

"Begorra, naygur, av yez say the worrud we'll move down upon the inemy."

"Don' see wha' harm dere cud be in dat," declared Pomp. "I'se wid yo', mah honey!"

Barney needed no further encouragement. He sprang into the pilot house.

The herders set up a shout as the machine began to move away. But Barney did not stop.

He sent the Traveler down a narrow pass among the ledges, and

straight toward the line of the foe. His purpose was, to if possible, get in their rear and give them a taste of the dynamite.

It was all very well planned, and fortune aided the Celt.

The machine glided like a meteor down the little defile. The next moment it turned obliquely to the right.

"Now, give it to thim!" cried Barney, as he saw a group of astonished outlaws along the ledges. They were apparently amazed at this audacious move.

Pomp needed no second bidding.

He leveled the dynamite gun and pushed the button. There was a booming, lightning flash, and the outlaws were swept like flies from the ledges and into eternity.

Certainly a dozen of them must have been disposed of in that moment, and down from bowlders and crags and ledges, there came rushing a perfect legion of them.

The air was filled with their battle yells. Straight for the machine they made their course. It was evident that they believed it already captured.

It was a thrilling moment.

But Barney and Pomp were right in their element. Neither one of them flinched.

Barney turned the machine straight about, and Pomp once more discharged the dynamite gun.

The shell struck a ledge opposite and blew tons of rock from it. The explosion mowed the foe down like ripened grain.

But it did not check them. On they came like a whirlwind.

At close quarters they might possibly have boarded the Traveler, and the result have proved serious.

But at this moment the herders came up and joined in the fray. They poured a deadly volley among the rascally crew.

Then Pomp sent another dynamite shell among them.

This turned the tide. A stentorian voice was heard, ordering a retreat. Like magic the attacking force vanished among the ledges. The battle was over, at least for the time.

In one sense it was a victory for the stock herders and the machine.

The foe had been repulsed with great slaughter. It was Barney's impulse to follow, but Pomp demurred.

"I reckon we bettah wait fo' Marse Frank's ordahs," he said. "Mebbe he cum back berry soon now."

But Barney shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Be me sowl I'm afraid that it will be a long day afore Misther Frank or the Dago himself cums back."

"Wha' yo' mean, honey?"

"Shure, jes' phwat I say. Suppose they have wandhered out av the camp an' fallen into the hands av thim outlaws? Shure it's mighty little teime wud be lift thim on this earth."

Pomp looked distressed.

"Fo' de lan's sakes! Wha' will become ob us if dey hab killed Marse Frank?" he wailed. "Dat am a drefful fing!"

"Fust off we'll make shure av it," declared Barney.

"How am we gwine to do dat?"

"I'll show yez."

The outlaws had fled leaving their dead and wounded behind them. On the ledge near by there reclined one of the outlaws who was suffering with a wound in his thigh.

This had prevented his flying with his companions and he lay there sullenly regarding the herders. Barney sprang down and approached him.

"Bad cess to yez fer a murderin' villain!" he cried. "Shure av yez don't answer me a foine question I'll finish yez up this moment."

As good fortune had it, this fellow, who was really a Mexican, could understand English.

"Si, senor!" he replied, respectfully, "spare the life of Juan and he will do as you bid!"

"That's roight!" cried the Celt, "it's a question I want yez to answer!"

"I will hear it!" replied the outlaw.

"An' answer it too, yez had better. Shure, has that cut-throat mather av yures taken any of our min prisoners since yisterday?"

Barney looked keenly at the outlaw. But the latter replied unhesitatingly:

"Si, senor!"

Barney was intensely excited.

"Ah!" he cried. "Who was it may I ask yez?"

"One of them was Don Jose Gonsalvo, the rich herder, the other, an Americano, probably your master."

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "Thin they are aloive?"

"They are under death sentence."

"Bejabers, thin we must save thim. Phwere are they imprisioned? How can we get to thim?"

"Will you spare my life if I tell?" asked the outlaw.

"Yis."

"Look yonder."

The outlaw pointed to a distant cliff, which formed a part of the mountain wall.

"Do you see a small dot upon the face of that cliff?"

Barney strained his gaze.

"Shure I do," he cried.

"Well, that is the window to their prison cell. But you can never reach them, I warn you."

"That's all I want to know!" cried Barney, wildly. "Shure, it's satisfied I am anyway. Are yez badly hurt? Shure, here's a bit to cheer yez up."

And Barney thrust a small flask of whisky into the outlaw's hand, for which he muttered his thanks.

Then the Celt sped back to the deck of the Traveler.

"Shure I have the truth now!" he cried as he met Pomp. "Misther Frank an' the Dago are prisoners in the den av the outlaws; wan av thim told me hisself!"

"Golly! yo' don' say!" cried Pomp in amazement. "Howebber did dat happen?"

"I can't say, naygur; only it's fer yez an' f to fly to his rescue roight off."

"A' right, sah! I'se wif yo' dead to rights!" cried Pomp.

By this time Juan Lodero, the lieutenant of Don Jose and the man who had taken command of the herders, rode up.

He could speak a smattering of English, and addressed Barney.

"What are we to do now, senor?" he asked. "Do you know where are Don Jose and your master?"

"Ay, sor, I do thot," replied Barney, and then told the story as given him by the wounded outlaw.

Lodero listened with interest, and then related the facts to his companions.

A sensation was created.

The herders were much excited, and for at once flying to the rescue of their chief, but they were confronted with another problem.

How were they to gain entrance to the outlaws' den? This must first be accomplished.

Barney still kept his eye upon the black spot on the mountain wall, and which the wounded outlaw had declared was a window.

Then he moved the machine towards it. The nature of the region prevented his getting extremely in good position.

But he did succeed in getting near enough to see the iron bars at the window. He experienced a thrill when he reflected that Frank and Don Jose were just beyond them.

He longed for wings with which to fly up to them. In lieu of these he anxiously watched the window for one of them to appear.

But they did not show themselves. Anxiously the two faithful fellows watched. Finally an idea came to Barney's mind.

"Begorra, av I cud shoot something up there, I'd make thim look out," he declared. "Faith, I'll thry it!"

"How am yo' gwine to do it, sah?" asked Pomp, incredulously.

"Yez kin kape yer eye on me an' ye'll see," replied Barney.

With which the Celt went into the pilot-house and hunted up some putty which he had, in case of need, for broken windows and other uses.

This he rolled up into a round ball and placed it in the breech of the pneumatic gun. It was the same size as a shell of dynamite, and could be propelled by the compressed air just as well.

Then Barney sighted the gun for the cliff window.

Carefully he drew aim and then pressed the button. It flew straight to the mark.

Through the barred window it went like a bullet. The Celt did not see its passage, so swift was it, but he knew that it had entered the window, for no mark of it was seen upon the outer wall. Then he awaited anxiously the result of the shot.

## CHAPTER V.

### A BOLD ESCAPE—A DARING RUSE.

FRANK and Don Jose were indeed in a sore frame of mind as the distant firing told them the truth, that the outlaws had attacked the camp.

They could have none but the worst fears, for they knew that the outlaws outnumbered their companions ten to one.

But Frank said:

"All depends on Barney and Pomp. "If they work sharp with the dyaamite guns they can hold the foe at bay, if not defeat them."

"Which I pray will be the case," declared Don Jose. "Oh, if we could only make our escape!"

"I see no chance."

"The window—"

"We could easily break the bars, but the descent is out of the question without a very long and strong rope."

"That we have not got."

"No."

"And there is no substitute."

"None."

Don Jose instinctively ran his eye about the room, but he saw that it was bare. He then fell to examining the walls.

Meanwhile Frank was at the window listening to the distant sounds of battle.

He could hear the rattle of the firearms and see the cloud of smoke, but there was no way of telling how the battle was going.

But what he was really listening for soon came.

This was the heavy boom of the dynamite shells. He heard it plainly, and then knew that the tide of battle must turn.

For nothing human could stand before the dynamite. They could blow thousands into eternity in a short space of time.

He heard the sounds of battle move from place to place. Then he saw distant forms flying over the ledges.

That they were the outlaws he had no doubt.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Come here, Don Jose. The foe are on the run. The dynamite has proved too much for them."

"That is good news, senor," declared the stock herder, "but I want your services for a brief moment."

Frank was astonished.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "What is it?"

He saw Don Jose at the door; the stock herder appeared much excited.

He had a small steel dagger in his hand; this had been hidden on his person and had not been taken away from him.

When Frank reached his side, the Spaniard said:

"Place your shoulder against the door, senor. Lift so, and you will see that the crack between the lock and the jamb is widened."

Frank did as directed.

"That is true," he agreed; "but what good will that do us?"

"You shall see."

As Frank lifted on the door, the stock herder thrust the point of his dagger under the iron bar of the heavy lock.

The blade bent, but it was of truest steel and did not break; steadily, slowly the bar slid back.

Frank saw at once his colleague's purpose. A wild thrill seized upon him.

It was but a step to liberty. If the bar could be slid back all the way—ah! it was done.

Both men stepped back.

They gazed at each other with a species of wild excitement. It was a full minute before either could speak.

Then Frank said:

"By Jove! You are a hero, Don Jose. We are free!"

"Not yet!" said the stock herder, tensely. "We are not yet out of this den of the thieves!"

"True, but we have made a good start. If we can only manage to reach the exit—"

Don Jose shook his head.

"That is not for me!" he said.

Frank gave a start.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"You forget the mission which brought me here. Life is nothing to me unless I can rescue—her!"

"Your daughter!"

"Si Senor!"

Frank bowed in acquiescence.

"It shall be so," he said. "We will find her before we leave this cavern."

Don Jose impulsively grasped Frank's arm. His eyes glistened.

"Do you mean that?"

"I do!"

"But—your life is dear to you and you have no obligation to stay. Go and leave me to succeed in my quest or die!"

Frank laughed musically.

"Enough of that, my friend," he said, "I am not that kind of a man!"

"You are a noble fellow!" cried Don Jose, gratefully. "Heaven will aid us, and we will succeed. I feel sure of that!"

The stock herder placed his hand on the iron door to swing it back. But at that moment a startling thing happened.

Through the open window an object flashed quick as a bullet. It struck the ceiling and fell in lumps to the floor.

It was some terrific force which had hurled this into the place. Frank picked up one of the lumps.

It was putty. In the midst of the mass he saw a tiny scrap of paper.

Quickly unfolding this, he saw that there was writing upon it; then he read in a scraggly hand:

"DEER MISTHER FRANK,—We know yez are up there, an shure we're bound to resky yez. Don't give up heart, fer the naygur an' mesilf is right onto ther game.

"Yours faithfully,

"BARNEY O'SHEA."

"From Barney!" exclaimed Frank, with amazement. "Don't that beat all? How did he ever throw this up here? Ah! I forget the electric gun."

Then he rushed to the window. It was easy for him to see the machine far below.

He could also see Barney and Pomp on the deck. Frank fluttered his handkerchief over the sill as a signal.

But Don Jose was impatient.

"If we are discovered, senor," he said, "all is lost."

"That is true," agreed Frank. "Let us lose no further time."

Then Don Jose swung open the door. They saw a corridor leading away into the darkness of a cavern passage. But none of the outlaws were in sight.

If a guard had been left at the door he was not there now. The coast was clear.

It was but a moment's work for the two prisoners to cross the threshold, and take the first step toward liberty.

Frank closed the door, so that if a guard should pass, suspicion might be allayed. Then they went on.

Through the corridor they went and into the passage. They had no means of knowing where it led.

Nor had they the slightest inkling of the location of Muriel's prison chamber, if, indeed, she was alive and in the cavern; all was guess work.

But neither were disposed for a moment to relinquish their undertaking.

So they kept on gliding like silent shadows through the cavern. The darkness was a boom.

It seemed as if they followed the cavern passage an interminable

ways, when suddenly it took a sharp turn and a great light shone before them.

A few steps further and they came out under a great dome which glittered with stalactites in the blaze of a huge fire which roared in the center of a cavern chamber far below.

They were at the moment in a sort of natural gallery which wound about the great circular chamber wall.

Below this were other galleries, and so on down to the floor. A more wonderful freak of nature could not be imagined.

It seemed hard to believe that the place had not been made with human hands, but such was the truth. The two escaped prisoners gazed upon the scene with wonderment.

About the chamber there were groups of armed men. This was the great hiding-place and den of Murillo.

But what instantly claimed the attention of both watchers was the fact that by the great fire stood three women.

Two of them were Spanish women, somewhat past the middle age. The third at once claimed attention.

She was slight and petite, with that wonderful dark type of beauty peculiar to the southern sister. Hers was what the poet might have called ravishing loveliness.

Don Jose leaned forward with hands tightly clasped, and his lips forming a Spanish prayer.

"Santa Maria be praised," he whispered; "it is she, safe and sound. My own Muriel, my child!"

Frank gazed with admiration upon the beautiful young girl. It was a moment of joy for him as well as for the grateful father.

"Then we have found her?" whispered Frank.

"That we have, senior, thanks to your goodness in coming hither with me. And she is unharmed. Oh, this is joy for me! I could meet the whole army of them, face to face, and try to wrest her from them."

"But that would be folly," declared Frank; "keep cool, my dear sir. We will find a method to rescue her."

"Oh, do you believe it," muttered the doting parent, excitedly; "let us carry out the project at once. There is no better time, for Murillo is absent with most of his men. Oh, if I had a score of my brave fellows here, I could capture the stronghold."

"No doubt," remonstrated Frank, "but you have not, and the best course for us is strategy."

"Strategy?"

"Yes."

"I will place myself in your hands, senior. What do you direct?"

Frank had revolved an idea quickly in his mind. It was a daring one and might meet with failure.

But nothing venture nothing win. So he philosophized and decided to risk the move.

"You are a good Spaniard," he said to Don Jose, "and you are familiar with the voice of Murillo. You shall shout down from the gallery that the prisoners are escaping through their cell window and order every man on peril of his life outside to intercept them. Do you understand?"

For a moment Don Jose gazed straight at Frank.

Then he struck his hands together.

"You are a genius, Senior Reade. When the men all leave the cavern—"

"We descend?"

"Si, senior, and God will help us to accomplish the rest."

"Then you are ready?"

"Yes."

Frank started down from the gallery. Don Jose called out:

"Where are you going?"

"Down to the floor below. You can come as soon as you have shouted the orders!"

"All right!"

Don Jose leaned far over the gallery, and threw his voice out. He imitated well the harsh roar peculiar to the outlaw chief.

"Out with you, dogs, on your lives! The prisoners are escaping by their cell window. Run out beneath it and intercept them, or every one who disobeys shall hang!"

In an instant the crowd upon the floor below were thrown into commotion. It was like a thunderbolt hurled into their midst.

Some looked up. But they could only see indistinctly a towering, angry form in the gallery. They had seemed to recognize their chief's voice.

They knew well what it meant to disobey.

With Spanish oaths they grasped their weapons and rushed from the chamber. In a few brief seconds the place was empty.

The Spanish duennas had caught the alarm, and sought to drag their charge away with them. But Don Jose shouted in delirious tones:

"Muriel, my child! I come! It is your father!"

A wild, silvery cry pealed from the young girl's lips. In a moment she sprang from the hold of the duennas.

But they were after her like fierce tigers. One of them held a keen dagger aloft.

It was likely that it would have been plunged to the hilt in the captive girl's form, but for Frank Reade, Jr.

The young inventor, swift as a flash sprang forward, and between the maddened woman and her victim, Frank threw up his arm and knocked the weapon aside.

Then he gripped the woman by the shoulders and forced her back with a warning cry. The next moment Muriel was in her father's arms.

Seeing that the game was up the two women fled to give the alarm. Frank knew there was no time to lose.

So he turned quickly.

"Come," he said, hurriedly. "We must wait for nothing. All depends upon quick work."

"Right, senior!" cried Don Jose, readily. "Come, Muriel, we must get out of this devil's trap."

All three fled into a passage leading out of the main chamber. Where it led they knew not.

But it was the only avenue of escape open at that moment and they perforce took it.

For what seemed an interminable ways they ran on. It was singular that they heard no sounds of pursuit in their rear.

Where the passage led they had no means of knowing. But all doubts were suddenly set at rest.

For a glimmer of daylight suddenly appeared in front of them. The next moment they emerged from the cavern.

The scene spread before them was an encouraging one.

A path led in winding course between high crags and bowlders. Along this they sped.

But no outlet of Murillo's stronghold was unguarded; and suddenly they came upon a desperado lying at full length across the defile, and armed to the teeth.

In an instant he was upon his feet, and drew a machete or keen short sword.

"Back, seniors, on your lives!" he cried, with a fierce oath. "What brings you this way?"

"We are in a hurry, you dog!" cried Don Jose, grandiloquently.

"We come by orders of Murillo. This is the fair seniorita, and I am her father."

But the guard was not to be bluffed. He stood doggedly in the path. A grim smile distorted his ugly face.

"Per Christ!" he exclaimed, "am I then to accept your word? My master has forbidden that. You must have the password."

Here was a dilemma.

What was to be done?

Both Frank and Don Jose saw that the guard was obdurate. They were unarmed. He had knives and pistols.

Delay was apt to be fatal. At any moment pursuers might appear. It was a desperate moment.

Frank exchanged glances with Don Jose.

It seemed utterly useless to temporize with the guard. He was keenly suspicious.

At this critical moment Frank's keen wits did not fail him. He quickly made use of the first strategy which came to him.

Fumbling in his pocket, he produced a bit of paper. This he handed to the guard, drawing nearer as he did so.

"Here, you cur!" he said, angrily; "take this and let us pass, or you will hang for it!"

The fellow bent over the paper to read it. Quick as a flash Frank's right fist went out.

It struck the luckless guard full behind the ear. No better spot could have been selected. He dropped as if shot.

"Now!" cried Frank, to his companions, "follow me!"

And away they rushed again down the defile. In a few moments they were threading their way among the bowlders and crags, striving to put all the distance possible between them and the cavern.

Success had waited upon them with almost fabulous servility. Yet the danger was by no means over.

At any moment they might stumble upon the foe, or indeed be overtaken.

Unarmed as they were, capture would be a matter of fact. It was now their province to find their friends and the Traveler.

Frank finally climbed one of the smaller crags to get some sort of a view of the region about. He saw at once that they had been going in the wrong direction to rejoin their friends.

So, as he descended, he at once changed his bearings.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FLOOD.

BARNEY and Pomp caught the signal from the cliff window. They knew that it came from Frank, and words could not express their delight.

"Be me sowl, it's something to know he's alive!" he cried joyfully.

"Shure it's a wonder the spalpeens didn't kill him at wanst."

"How am we gwine to git up dar?" asked Pomp, looking up to the window with incredulous eyes.

"Shure we niver kin do that," declared Barney, "it's to foind our way into the place we must be doin'."

"Huh! whar am dat?"

"We've got to luk for it av coorse, yez thick skull," cried Barney.

"Can't yez iver see anythin' at all, at all?"

"A'right sah! Yo' am de boss ob dis expedition," said Pomp, cheerfully. "I leabs it all to yo'."

"Begorra, that's aisy to do," retorted the Celt.

Then Barney did some shrewd thinking. Now really the Celt was a shrewd plotter.

It did not take him long to hit upon a plan.

"There's wan thing shure," he concluded, "the cavern is in that cliff an' Mither Frank is there too. Now there's some way to git in there an' I'm ther chap what's going to do it."

So he went into the pilot house and started the machine ahead. Juan Lodero and his men followed him.

Barney directed the course of the Traveler along as near the base of the cliff as he could.

Then he made some calculations.

Thus far none of the various paths had led down to the cliff. But they all seemed to lead toward its upper angle.

Perhaps the entrance was upon the other side of the mountain wall. At least Barney decided to look for it there.

So he kept on in that direction. Pomp was a trifle skeptical.

But he said nothing, which was lucky for him.

And now suddenly the herders ran upon a snag. This was nothing less than an ambush, arranged by the outlaws.

From a height near by they poured a deadly fire down upon the passing cavalcade. For a moment men fell thick and fast.

Then Lodero ranged his men behind a line of bowlders and began to return the fire. Barney sighted one of the guns at the cliff and let fly.

Crack—crash!

The shell exploded with awful force upon the summit of the elevation. In a moment the bodies of outlaws were hurtling in air.

It did not require many of these discharges to dislodge the foe and drive them from the position with heavy loss.

At this signal victory the herders cheered. It could be seen that the Traveler was a powerful ally.

But this little skirmish with the outlaws had a most excellent effect in another direction. Wandering about among the crags, Frank and his companions heard the firing.

No better guide could be wished for, and at once they set out for the scene of action.

But this move required the exercise of great caution. Of course there was the deadly danger of meeting the foe in their retreat.

And this very thing was just what did happen.

But the three fugitives hid safely in a crevice of the ledges while the discomfited outlaws went hurrying by. They were not discovered.

This was certainly the best of good fortune. Once more satisfied that the coast was clear they emerged and pushed on.

And suddenly turning a corner in the ledges they came upon the advance guard of the herders. The scene that followed baffles description.

The next moment the machine had come up and a grand reunion followed. Barney and Pomp were beside themselves with delight.

While the herders were all overjoyed that Don Jose had recovered his daughter. There seemed no further need now of tarrying in the vicinity.

Don Jose was anxious to get back to his dismantled ranch, and set things to rights again.

Frank was ready to push further along into the Chaco and explore the upper regions beyond the Bermejo.

But first of all, it was necessary to get out of this locality which was beset with so many perils.

It was easy for the outlaws to pick off the herders from the various heights about. They were deadly marksmen.

So, after matters were discussed at some length, it was decided to get out of the hill country and camp for the night on the plain outside.

Here the outlaws could not harass them, except at long range. The start was made at once.

They struck into a deep gorge with high walls, which seemed to promise an exit to the pampas beyond.

This was just what it was, but that it had any other use was a fact not known to the herders.

As the party ambled along through it, all were impressed with the fact that it had one day likely been the bed of a mighty river.

There was every indication of this. The gravel drift showed it plainly enough. Also there were water marks upon the walls.

What seemed a curious thing was the fact that their retreat was not harassed by the outlaws.

What did this mean?

Frank did some shrewd thinking.

"They are up to some devilry," he concluded; "we shall very soon find out what it is."

And his words proved prophetic.

The truth was that far up the course of this gorge, the river which had once flowed through it was held in abeyance by a mighty dam, the work of the outlaws. It made a huge body of water in a deep basin in the hills.

What Murillo's purpose was in hoarding up this water nobody ever knew. But just now it came in to suit his purpose first class.

For his hated foes were all in the gulch or canyon. At a word from him the flood gates could be opened and the whole lake precipitated down upon the retreating party. This was not warfare but murder. But what cared Murillo for that?

His revengeful nature was aroused. He sought now to sweep his foes utterly from existence.

The first intimation received by the retreating party of the awful fate in store for them was a sudden distant thunderous roar.

It came to the ears of Frank and Don Jose as they were upon the deck of the Traveler. In one swift instant the truth burst upon the young inventor.

"My soul!" he gasped; "did you hear that, Don Jose?"

"Ay!" replied the herder. "What was it, senor?"

"They have let loose a flood of water. I can hear it roaring in the distance!" shouted Frank.

Don Jose's face was ashen pale.

"Do you believe that?" he cried.

"Ay, that I do! We will do well to escape with our lives. Put on all speed, Barney. Spare nothing to reach the plain. Ho! Give the warning to your men, Don Jose."

What followed was like a jumbled dream. But Don Jose had little need to give the warning to his men.

They had also heard and understood.

Juan Lodero spurred to the rail of the Traveler, and shouted:

"What say you, master? Shall we not flee?"

"For your lives!" shouted Don Jose, "don't draw whip nor spur until you are out of this accursed place."

"Forward, men!" shouted Don Juan. And away went the cavalcade. The hardy and fleet little Argentine horses extended themselves like greyhounds.

On down the gorge they went at furious speed. They were fully a quarter of a mile ahead before the Traveler got fully under way.

Already a boiling stream began to flash down the water course. It was the first appraisal of the flood to follow.

The thunder and the roaring drew every moment nearer. It was most appalling to hear.

Muriel and Don Jose wrapped in each other's arms stood upon the Traveler's deck as it thundered on. Barney put on full speed.

How far it was to the outlet from the gorge none knew, but it did not yet seem in sight.

At such a rate of speed, the machine bade fair to overtake the horsemen. But these latter seemed likely to fare better than the Traveler's party.

For the gorge had suddenly widened, and the slope of its sides so decreased, that the horses found foothold to reach a plateau a hundred feet above. This the shrewd horsemen had availed themselves of, and were now high above danger from the flood.

But the Traveler could not follow them.

It must keep on down the gorge, and trust to the good luck of outstripping the pursuing waters.

Barney held the lever wide open. The rubber tires bounded over the stony surface, but as fortune had it the course was very clear.

And on, and on it ran. It was a thrilling ride. Barney clung to the steering wheel with set teeth and flashing eyes.

The least loss of nerve, a slight deviation, might have thrown the machine against the rocky wall on either side, and brought destruction to it and death to its occupants.

The water was now already over the tires, and was whirling in thin crescendo high over the pilot house as the wheels picked it up.

Soon it was half way to the hubs. A little more and the course of the machine would be greatly retarded. The thunder in the rear was now most appalling to hear.

At this juncture a happy idea occurred to Frank. He sprang to one of the dynamite guns amidships. He swung the muzzle around to the rear.

They were just passing an overhanging cliff. Frank placed two of the dynamite shells in the breech.

He sighted the tube swift as thought and pressed the valve.

Swish—ping! Crash—boom!

The two shells struck the cliff angle with vivid lightning flash and terrific roar. There fell into the gorge mighty masses of the rock.

It closed the gap to a height of several feet. Naturally the water was for a moment checked. The respite was brief, the obstacle small, but yet it had its effect.

For the machine made one more great spurt and—

"Hurrah—hurrah!"

The mad cheers went up from all on board. The gorge widened and the plain showed beyond. Barney swept to the left, up a slow ascent, and out of the waters.

The next moment a great tearing wall of foam and surge, fifty feet in height, came madly out of the gorge, and fell with cataract fury upon the plain below. At a safe point those on board the Traveler watched the mighty spectacle.

Had they been overtaken by that awful mass of water, they must have been crushed to atoms. The thought was sufficient to make one's blood creep.

"Santa Maria be praised!" cried Don Jose; "we are spared by a miracle!"

"You may well say that," declared Frank, "it is one of the most narrow of escapes that I ever had."

It was full twenty minutes before the gorge emptied itself. Then the plain below was one mighty lake.

When the waters had all come out of the gorge, the herders came leisurely riding out, picking their way along as best they could.

Red Murillo's scheme had failed and not one of the party had fallen a victim to his infamous trap. This was a matter for deep congratulation.

A conference was now held as to what it was best to do. And as the party were thus debating a startling sound came to their ears.

It was distant shouting and laughter mingled with the tramp of horses' feet. Frank and Don Jose exchanged glances.

"As I live!" exclaimed the young inventor, "I believe it is Murillo and his gang coming down the gorge!"

"Si, senor," agreed Don Jose, "probably they expect to find our dead bodies on the way. They will be disappointed."

"Indeed, yes."

"What shall we do?"

Frank set his lips tightly.

"I believe that we will meet them," he said. "Why should we not give them a parting shot? They tried to exterminate us. We can with justice retaliate."

"Good!" cried Don Jose, eagerly. "They certainly deserve it. What shall be the order, senor?"

"Draw your men up in the shadow of that cliff," said Frank. "Barney, go to the right gun, and I will go to the left. When they appear, give it to them!"

"All roight, sor?"

These orders were quickly obeyed. Then the party of herders awaited results.

Nearer came the sounds of laughter and apparent jest. Soon the cavalcade of outlaws came in sight. Not until the last man had rode out of the canyon did Frank speak.

Then he said:

"Now, Barney!"

The next moment both dynamite guns were discharged. The shells struck full and fair in the midst of the gang of ruffians.

Many an honest soul was avenged in that moment; many a crime-stained wretch expiated his evil deeds.

When the smoke cleared the ground was seen to be covered with mangled men and horses. How many was slaughtered was never known.

But a few were seen disappearing up the canyon. The survivors could have been but few.

Frank did not pause to look further upon the scene. He sprung to the pilot-house and put on speed.

"Come, friends," he cried, "let us say farewell to Red Murillo and his den! I doubt if he ever troubles us again."

"Amen," said Don Jose, piously, and clasped Muriel closer to him.

For days the party traveled eastward: then came the parting of the ways.

Frank Reade, Jr., was desirous of continuing his journey of exploration further into the wilderness, so as to eventually come out at Rio Janeiro, and rejoin Captain Randall and the Utopia.

Don Jose was eager to return and reconstruct his hacienda. So at a suitable point near the banks of the Bermejo river the party separated.

Thrilling, indeed, had been their adventures. Fortune had smiled upon their enterprise, and there was good reason for mutual congratulation, though for the Traveler and its party, the thrilling incidents of the journey had but just begun.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DUCK HUNT—THE WATER PYTHON.

DON JOSE and his men galloped away to the southward. While Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp, turned the head of the Traveler to the northward.

The next day they crossed the Bermejo river and headed for the boundary line of Paraguay, which was the Pilcomayo river.

The character of the Chaco country now changed a trifle.

The wide pampas began to break up into table lands and were intersected with rivers and jungles. They were every moment getting deeper into the tropics.

And all signs of civilization utterly vanished.

Not a white man was seen for days, and in fact no sign of human being either. There were no dearth of animal life, however.

And one bit of experience with the latter, the party were destined to not soon forget.

As it happened some of the machinery got slightly out of order, and Frank brought the machine to a halt in the verge of a deep jungle.

As it would require some hours of work which he alone could perform Barney and Pomp hit upon a plan. They were very desirous of taking a hunting trip.

So they brought out their shotguns, and, with Frank's permission, prepared for a brief excursion into the jungle. Frank took occasion to read them a lecture.

"Do not fail to proceed with the utmost care," he declared. "The danger from wild beasts is not to be lightly thought of. Keep your eyes open."

"All roight, sor!" cried Barney.

"We'se gwine to do it, Marse Frank," declared Pomp.

So the two jokers thus adjured and equipped set out. Soon they were deep in the jungle.

A small river ran through this part of the jungle and getting wider some further on made a lagoon. This was well stocked with ducks.

These were what the two hunters were after. Soon they were in a fine covert and had a line on the ducks.

It did not take them but a few moments to bag a dozen with their repeating shotguns.

But alas! the birds dropped in the water of the lagoon, in some instances a hundred yards distant. With no boat how were they to secure them?

For a moment they were in a quandary. Then Barney threw off his coat.

"Be jabers, there's wan way to get them," he cried.

"How am dat chile?" asked Pomp.

"Shure, I can swim fer them!"

"Huh! does yo' want some big 'gator to get yo', sah?"

"'Gator?" exclaimed Barney. "Shure there's no alligators in there."

"Don' yo' be so shuah!" said Pomp, positively, "yo' neber kin tell whar to look fo' dem critters. Dey jes' lie down dere in de mud. An' I tell yo' dey cum up pretty quick when de time come!" Barney scratched his head.

He was perplexed.

"Be me sowl!" he muttered. I'm afther wantin' the ducks bad

enuff, but I don't want to be chewed up be alligators an' yez kin bet on it."

"Den yo' wants to keep out ob de watah, sah," declared Pomp solemnly.

"Well, sor," cried Barney, "how iver are we goin' to git them ducks, I'd loike fer to know? Shure I'm not goin' back widout them."

"Mebbe we kin reach dem wif a long pole," ventured Pomp. But Barney scoffed at this.

"Shure there's no pole hereabouts that is long enough!" he cried; "but we might build a raft, naygur. Phwat do yez say?"

"Don' keer much," replied Pomp. "I'se reddy to do jes' wha' yo' say."

And even this seemed to be a difficult task. But Barney was not to be defeated.

He finally found some palmetto logs. These were light and porous, and seemed to float easily enough. Then some vines were used to bind them together, and in a very short while they had a presentable raft.

But it would hardly support the two of them.

Which should be the one to venture out upon the surface of the lagoon? Pomp was by no means anxious.

Visions came to him of mighty alligators, large enough to swallow man and raft, perhaps. Now, if there is one thing a negro fears, it is an alligator.

Barney saw this and grinned. He produced a penny and said:

"Begorra, naygur, it's odd or even to see which av us goes!"

"A'right!" agreed Pomp, with a wry face.

So Barney held the coin tightly clasped in his hand.

"Now are yez ready?" he asked.

"Yes, sah!" replied Pomp.

"Is it odd or even?"

"It am an even numbah."

"Bejabers, here goes!"

Barney opened his hand. The coin lay with date uppermost. Each looked at it and saw that the date was 1866.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "I'se de winnah. Shuah, it am even."

"Bejabers, that's roight," said Barney, lightly; "an' it's jist as well fer that, fer yez wud have been afraid to have gone anyway!"

"Yo' ain' no right to say dat, sah," protested the coon.

"Shure, yez know it!" cried Barney, banteringly. "Well, here goes!"

And he leaped upon the raft. He pushed it out into the pool boldly, and set out to cross it.

But with the first thrust of the long pole his face changed. He could not touch the bottom. For ought he knew it was a mile deep.

"Be me sowl," he muttered, "Here's a foine go. It'll niver do fer me to git tipped over, bejabers!"

He paddled the raft slowly across the black water. In a few moments he picked up one of the ducks.

Pomp all the while was watching him with deepest interest. If a huge alligator had suddenly risen and swallowed man and raft, it would not have surprised him in the least.

Barney was elated at the success of his efforts thus far. He feared no alligators.

In his exuberance of soul he began to sing lustily:

"Shure, Rory, be aisy,  
Don't taise me no more,  
Fer it's six toimes to-day  
Yez have kissed me before,  
An' there goes another—whist!  
An' there to make sure!  
Faith, there's luck in odd numbers.  
Quoth Rory O'More."

Then something peculiar happened. The water in the pool began to churn and boil furiously.

The little raft rocked like a ship in a gale. In an instant the Celt's tune changed.

"Phwat the devil's the matter?" he cried in amazement. "Shure phwat's happened?"

"Look out fo' yo'se'f!" screamed Pomp, "it am a 'gator, didn't I tole yo' so? Dar am his head!"

And up from the black pool right at the end of the raft, there suddenly appeared a darting, hissing head with venomous fangs.

"Suferin' Caesar!" gasped Barney, in abject terror, "it am a snake?"

Now if there was one thing the Celt was afraid of it was a snake.

Not even Pomp's fear of an alligator could be as intense. For a moment the Celt was nigh fainting.

There was that monster serpent head dancing about the raft. The leviathan form was making the water foam all about.

It was one of the monster water pythons which frequent South American rivers, and must have been fully fifty feet in length. It had glided into the pool from the sedgy grass at its verge, evidently recognizing in Barney a choice morsel of food.

But now that it was in the water it was at a loss to know just how to get at its intended victim.

It is a well known fact that a snake while in the watter is utterly unable to strike. About the raft the monster sailed, trying to get at his victim.

Pomp, on the shore, was yelling like a madman. He seemed to have lost his senses completely.

But after the first shock of the encounter was over Barney recovered in a measure his self-possession.

He saw that the snake was unable to get at him, and this reassured him. He at once shouted to Pomp.

"Shut up yer yelling, yez big stuff!" he cried. "Don't yez see that wen't do any good?"

This caused Pomp to sober down.

"Massy Lordy, chile," he wailed, "wha' am we gwine to do if dat snake gits yo'?"

"Be jabbers I'll give him a tough bit of chewing!" declared the Celt, as he spat on his hands and gripped his only weapon, the pole, tighter. He had left his rifle with Pomp.

"I reckon I bettah go fo' Marse Frank!" cried the coon.

"Divil a bit!" cried Barney. "Don't yez see yez will leave me here to be ate up by the omadhaun?"

"Wha' am I gwine to do?"

"Hain't yez got a gun? Shure it's aisy enough to use that!"

Pomp picked up his gun. It carried small shot, and he knew this could never injure the serpent at that range.

But nevertheless he drew aim at the creature's head and fired.

Just as was expected the shot had little effect.

They simply stung the reptile and urged it to fiercer efforts. The raft now threatened to capsize.

"Don't yez do any more av that," cried Barney, "shure av yez can't kill him don't shoot at all, at all? Och, I wish I had me Winchester here!"

"Golly, I jes' go an' get it fo' yo'!" cried Pomp.

"An' lave me here to be ate up be the monsther?" cried Barney. "Shure that's all the feelin yez have!"

"Golly, wha' am I gwine fo' to do?" cried Pomp in perplexity.

"Jes' keep yure head, that's all," cried Barney; "have yez any buck-shot? Yez moight give him a charge av that!"

But Pomp avowed that he had nothing of the kind. Meanwhile the raft was drifting back nearer to shore.

Barney did not attempt to prevent it. An idea had occurred to him.

When the raft should come within a few feet of the shore he was determined to make a leap and run for it. He believed it possible that the big snake would not leave the pool.

He communicated this intention to Pomp. The darky retreated what was a safe distance and awaited developments, all the while praying that his friend might succeed.

Nearer the shore drifted the raft. Meanwhile, the python had ceased its thrashing about and lay passively on the surface, with its huge head at the edge of the raft and its gleaming eyes fixed on Barney.

It was an uncomfortable position for the Celt, but he made the best of it.

Nearer the shore the raft now rapidly drew. Nearer, and now scarcely ten feet intervened.

Nearer, and suddenly Barney made a quick run, a leap, and struck the bank. He stumbled, but picked himself up, and away he went at full speed.

But what of the python?

Did it leave the pool?

Ay, that it did, and with the greatest of celerity. It was evident at once that this was just the game it wanted.

Barney heard a crashing sound in his rear and once looked back. He never forgot that sight.

There was a mighty brown body coming after him like a whirlwind. As well try to escape from the wind.

The next moment he heard the fearful hiss in his rear and a hideous head was thrust past his face. Then he tripped and fell at the foot of a huge eucalyptus.

The serpent shot on beyond him, but came about in a great coil and before Barney could gain his feet the coils were about him.

Words cannot describe the sensations of the Celt at that moment. He had just time to instinctively unsheathe his knife.

Then he lashed out with it right and left. He made furious blows at the hideous head dancing above him.

The knife struck its mark and blood flowed over him in a torrent. But the snake's method was to crush its victim into stupidity and devour it alive.

So the deadly folds were crushing Barney into insensibility. His terrific blows with the knife seemed to have no effect.

But just as the Celt fainted rescue came. All this while Pomp had not been idle.

It was not like the darky to stand idly by and see his companion killed. He had started in pursuit of the snake as it in turn pursued Barney.

And without the slightest hesitation the plucky coon flung himself upon the reptile.

He also had nothing but his knife, save the shot-gun. But at short range he believed the latter would be effective.

And so it proved.

He placed the muzzle as near to the reptile's dancing head as he could and fired. The shot took away the monster's lower jaw.

Mad with pain, it hissed furiously and made a blow at Pomp. But the darky dodged and fired full at the reptile's eye.

This told the tale.

The shot entered the creature's brain and terminated the struggle. It indulged in furious contortions, but the folds about Barney relaxed and the Celt fell over.

Pomp hastened to drag him away to a safe distance. Then for a few moments Pomp was indescribably sick.

The peculiar odor which the creature carried about it was the cause of this. But after retching a few moments he recovered.

Barney had now recovered his senses and sat up. For a few moments he was dazed.

Then he slowly took in the situation. He saw the snake's body some distance away, and then looked up at Pomp.

"Be me sowl, naygur, yez kilt him!" he declared.

"Yas, sah, an' a lily bit mo' yo' goose wud hab been cooked!"

"Be jabbers I'll not forget that! Bad cess to the baste! Shure he had me nigh smashed to pieces."

"How yo' feel now?"

"Bethter, an' thanks to yez!"

"Wha' yo' say an' we start back fo' de Trabbler? Dere ain' no luck here, chile. Mebbe some mo' ob dem big snakes around yere."

"Begorra, I'm wid yez," cried Barney, gaining his feet slowly.

"Shure phwat an awful smell the crayther has?"

In a few moments they were en route for the machine. They did not even return for the ducks nor think of pursuing the hunt further.

They were glad enough, a short while later, to drag themselves aboard the Traveler. They were a very much used up pair of hunters.

Frank was surprised.

"What is the matter with you fellows?" he cried. "You look as if you had been through seven cities!"

"Be me sowl, we feel about that way, sor," declared Barney. And then they told their story.

But they had scarcely finished when Frank sprang up with a sharp cry.

"On my word!" he cried, "here comes the mate of that fellow, no doubt to avenge his death!"

Astounded, Barney and Pomp gazed in the direction indicated. They saw that this was the truth.

A monster python was coming straight through the jungle and down upon the machine.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MANY ADVENTURES—THE END.

It is a well known fact that pythons of this variety usually travel in pairs and that if harm comes to one the other will endeavor to avenge it.

It will travel miles and exhaust much ingenuity to track down and kill its foe. That this was the purpose of the present one there was no doubt.

For a moment Frank was at a loss what to do.

He did not think that the serpent could not do the machine any great harm. Yet on the whole he hardly cared to come to very close quarters with the monster.

All three explorers very discreetly retired to the security of the pilot house. Then they watched results.

The python came on angrily, with uplifted head and hissing fiercely. It was truly a formidable looking reptile and the explorers could not but feel glad that they were not on even ground with it.

"Begorra, I 'ave had enough av this country," cried Barney, "shure I draw the line at snakes. Be me sowl I'd rayther meet the divil himsilf."

"You are well warranted in that, Barney," declared Frank; "especially such a monster as this."

"Golly! wha' yo' gwine to do, Marse Frank? Am yo' gwine fo' to let him come any nigher, sah?"

"I don't see what harm he can do; he cannot possibly get at us."

"Yas, sah; but what if he puts his coils about dis machine, sah, an' crushes it all to pieces?"

Both Barney and Pomp looked alarmed. But Frank only laughed. "I will take care of his snakeship," he said; "never fear about that."

The python paused for a moment at sight of the Traveler. It was plain that it was puzzled.

Not seeing any living creature, it was baffled. It made a cautious detour of the machine.

And as it did so all were prone to note the exceeding swiftness and power of its motion. It moved like a veritable spirit and with the speed of a whirlwind.

Round and round the machine it went, evidently very much puzzled. Then it made a sudden blow at the pilot house.

Its head came crashing against the plate glass, and then it slid over the rail and across the deck. Barney and Pomp with yells of dismay retreated into the cabin.

Frank laughed until the tears ran at their terror. Meanwhile the python had thrown its coils about the body of the Traveler.

But stram as it could it was unable to make any impression on the steel hull, though the pressure was certainly enormous.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed the young inventor, "it's a good thing the machine is strongly built."

But Frank now decided to put an end to the affair. He went about it in a confident and systematic way.

First he procured a wire and coiled it about his arm until he had made a strong loop. One end of this he connected with the dynamos, affixing a stop key.

Then he opened one of the pilot house windows and exposed himself there. In vain Barney and Pomp tried to remonstrate.

He only laughed, and said:

"Have no fear; I know what I am doing."

The python's glistening eyes became suddenly fixed upon him. Slowly and silently the huge creature began to glide toward him.

Frank threw the coil of wire out onto the deck. Then he watched the snake's approach.

He knew his power and his safety. He knew that the snake would have to cross the wire to reach him.

The moment it should come in contact with the wire, it would be a dead snake, so Frank felt no risk whatever.

Nearer drew the reptile slowly. The young inventor saw the deadly glare in its eyes; knew its preconceived purpose and waited his chance.

Now the moment had come.

The snake's huge body was upon the wire. Frank drew a deep breath. Then he pressed the key.

Crash!

The mighty body of the reptile went hurtling from the deck of the Traveler. Over and over it rolled upon the green sward in fearful contortions.

But only for a few moments. The electric current had done its deadly work. The snake lay a quivering, lifeless mass.

Then Barney and Pomp came tremblingly out of the cabin. Frank could not help but laugh at them.

"Well, well!" he cried; "you are a plucky pair! There is your snake, as dead as Haman!"

"Bress de Lor!" breathed Pomp; "I'se done glad ob dat!"

"Begorra, I was fearful that it wud git yez, Misther Frank!"

"Nonsense!" replied Frank. "We have worse foes to conquer before we reach Rio de Janeiro—be sure of that."

Frank made sure that the snake was dead, and then descended and measured it. The length was a little under sixty feet. Truly it was a monster!

On terra firma a single man, with ordinary weapons, would stand but a slight chance against such a monster.

But Frank had finished the repairs to the machinery, and as there were yet some hours of daylight left it was decided to push on.

Before nightfall they approached the great rapids of the Pilcomayo river. Upon its opposite shore was Paraguay.

Frank looked for a good place to make a crossing. It required a great deal of search to do this.

But finally he found a great pool at the foot of the rapids where the water was calm. The machine slid into this and made its way across.

Arrived upon the opposite bank, the travelers could see green prairies extending far to the northward. This was an encouraging prospect for the morrow.

"We shall find easier traveling now," he declared. "We will strike the Paraguay river about on the Tropic of Capricorn, and thence it is a straight line east to Rio."

"Begorra, I'll be glad to get back to civilization," declared Barney. "I'm about tired av thravelin' in a wilderness."

"Golly, it don't take much to tire yo' I reckon," sniffed Pomp.

"Don't yez be afther makin' mock av me, sor!" cried Barney, threateningly.

"Huh! I don't keer a red cent fo' yo', sah!" sniffed Pomp.

"Yez don't, eh?"

"No, sah!"

"Well, now I kin tell yez that I don't allow nobody, juke, lord nor Prisdint to iasult me, sor. Av I get afther you, yez will quick foind out."

"Yo' am a good talker," declared Pomp, making a wry face at the Celt.

This was too much for Barney.

He made a dive at the darky. A lively ruction would have followed then and there had it not been for Frank; but he stopped it.

For an hour now the machine ran on over a level plain. It was a great relief to find smooth going.

When darkness came they had reached the base of what might have been called a butte in the middle of the great plain.

It was a solitary eminence with rocky crags and angles. It, however, afforded a good place to camp, and Frank stopped the machine.

Darkness settled down rapidly. Pomp was quickly busy preparing the evening meal.

The darky was a fine cook and soon had served up a good repast. After it was over the party went out on deck and Frank lit a cigar while Barney and Pomp indulged in a pipe.

The night was as dark as Erebus, there being not a star visible. In fact there were indications of a storm.

Now Frank knew what the meaning of a tropical storm was. So he had decided not to move away from the protection of the butte if the storm should show any disposition to break the next day.

For some while the trio sat out on the Traveler's deck. The air was sultry and too warm for retiring to sleep with any degree of comfort.

So all were glad to remain out of doors. Frank was doing some deep thinking and Barney and Pomp as usual were joking each other.

But suddenly the Celt chanced to throw his gaze upward to the summit of the butte. He gave a sharp cry.

It attracted Frank's attention.

"What's the matter, Barney?" he asked.

"Divil a bit do I know!" replied the Celt; "but wud yez look up there, sor!"

Frank looked up and saw what seemed to be a luminous glow near the summit of the Butte. He saw that it was firelight reflected against a cliff wall. He could ascribe it to but one thing.

"A camp-fire!" he muttered.

Then the curiosity of all was aroused. The question naturally became, who was in this wild part of the world and encamped in such a peculiar spot.

Was it white men, herders or prospectors, or was it a band of natives? Frank determined to find out.

So he said:

"Barney, bring out my rifle and your own. Pomp, go into the pilot-house and stay there, and keep a good lookout until we return!"

"Phwat are yez going to do, Misther Frank?" asked Barney.

"Can't you see?"

"Yez are going up there?"

"Of course!"

"Whurroo! I'm wid yez, sor!"

Into the cabin rushed the Celt. In a few moments he came out with the two rifles. Then preparations were quickly made.

Pomp did not demur at being left alone. To him orders were orders and he must obey.

Dropping from the deck of the machine Frank and Barney started up the butte. They found it by no means an easy climb.

Up they went until it seemed as if they were in the clouds. But the glow above was their guide.

And as they drew nearer to it they became well satisfied that it was really a camp-fire. Somebody was spending the night there.

And now a surprise was accorded them. They came into what was unmistakably a beaten path.

This would seem to indicate that the butte was a regular stopping place for campers, or that the settlement there was permanent.

At all events they would soon know. Frank pushed ahead now with more of caution.

Suddenly he paused.

"Hush," he said; "do you hear anything, Barney?"

"Shure, an' I do, sor!"

"It is human voices?"

"Yis, sor!"

"We must proceed carefully now, for we do not know the character of those in the camp."

"All roight, sor!"

A moment later Frank reached an angle in the path, and beheld a surprising scene. Deep in the side of the butte, there was a sort of artificial cavern or tunnel.

It extended into the earth for a matter of twenty feet. From the arch of the excavation there hung a lantern. Just beneath there burned a small fire of fagots.

And in the excavation, two men, ragged, unkempt and grimy, were digging with pickax and shovel. Near by a little spring bubbled from the side of the butte, and near this was a cradle and rocker, such as is used by miners for the washing of gold.

"By jove," muttered the young inventor, "they are gold diggers!"

"Shure an' that's phwat they are, sor," declared Barney.

At this moment one of the miners came out of the excavation.

He had a pan of pay dirt which he was about to proceed to wash out, but at that moment, acting on an impulse, Frank stepped boldly out into view.

"I beg your pardon, my friend," he said; "I wish you a very good evening."

A sudden cry of alarm burst from the miner's lips. He grabbed a rifle near, and the other digger came rushing out.

But a glance at Frank's face was enough.

They could see at once that his guise was not that of a foe. And as they now stood revealed to Frank, the young inventor exclaimed:

"Americans!"

"Yes, sir, that is what we are," replied one of the miners. "My name is John Valentine, of New York, and this is Sam Benton, of Chicago. We are miners, as you see; who are you?"

"We are Americans also," replied Frank.

"Thunder and guns! What are ye doing in this God forsaken part of the world?"

"We are exploring."

"Looking fer dust?"

"No, sir. Simply exploring for our own amusement. My name is Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown."

"Jericho!" exclaimed one of the miners. "I've heard of you. Aren't you a great inventor?"

"I am an inventor."

"An' didn't you patent an air-ship an' a submarine boat?"

"I built both of those," replied Frank, in his modest way.

"By Jinks! I guess I have heard of you. And I can tell you we're mighty glad to meet you. If yon've got your air ship here now we'd like to sail home with you!"

"I have no air ship here," laughed Frank, "but I have a good substitute."

"Ah! what's that?"

"The Electric Traveler!"

"Come now, what's that?"

"If you will come down to the foot of this hill I'll show you!"

"Of course we will!"

It was truly a strange meeting in this out of the way part of the world; but, as they were countrymen, a common bond of sympathy was at once created.

In a very short while mutual explanations had followed, and all were the best of friends.

The two prospectors paid a visit to the Traveler and were charmed with the machine.

"Why," cried Valentine, "if you will go with us with this machine up among the Red Indians in Bolivia, we can bring back a million dollars' worth of gold!"

"I am obliged to decline," replied Frank. "I would have no use for the gold, for I am already wealthy. But if you have had enough of this region, I can give you passage to Rio."

"Thank you a thousand times!" cried both men.

Then they went further into details as regarded their enterprise. It seemed that they had come from Rio to this wilderness, hearing from the dying lips of an old miner of this butte.

He had declared it to be rich in pay dirt. But it was in a perilous region, and to get there and back involved a great deal of risk.

But they had succeeded and had already extracted a large fortune from the butte. They were quite ready to return to civilization and eagerly embraced Frank's kind offer.

The next morning their effects and the ore, fully one hundred thousand dollars' worth, were removed on board the Traveler.

And as chance had it they were not a moment too soon.

For just as the last load went on board the machine, Barney, who was in the pilot house, cried:

"Begorra, there comes some Injins as I live. Shure phwat do yez make av thim, Misther Frank!"

The young inventor needed but to give one glance at the horde of barbarians who were riding toward the butte on their hardy ponies.

They were the Red Indians of the dreaded Andes, always the foe of the white man and merciless in all their treacherous ways.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Valentine, "this is nothing short of a miracle. We could not have had a closer call."

"If I had not happened along here last night, what would be your position now?" asked Frank.

"A deadly one," replied the miner.

"They might have passed on without examining the butte."

"Not they. Be sure they have found signs of us already. See, they intend to come this way. We would have paid for our gold with our lives!"

Frank smiled grimly.

"Let us see how far this way they will come," he muttered.

With which he placed a shell in the breech of one of the dynamite guns. He discharged it into the plain, just in front of the red horde.

The effect was thrilling.

Horses and men were piled in a heap. A mighty cloud of dust and smoke rose high in the air. When it cleared, the red Indians were seen to be scattered in all directions.

They made off at full speed, and were not seen again.

As all was now in readiness, Frank waited no longer, but started away to the eastward.

The journey to Rio Janeiro from here was devoid of any thrilling incident, for beyond the upper Parana River the country was thickly settled, and no perils were to be encountered.

Through the prosperous plantations of the Gringos the machine made its way, received everywhere with wonder but much hospitality.

In due course the Sierra Do Mar range of mountains was crossed, and Rio de Janeiro, beautiful city, lay at their feet.

The waters of the South Atlantic were before them, and, perhaps, the happiest members of the party were the two miners, who were returning to America with a large fortune.

At Rio they were met by Captain Randall who was on the outlook for them.

"You are a full month early!" cried the jovial captain. "My men are loath to leave Rio so soon, for they have been having a gay time."

"Very well," replied Frank, "let them stay the month out, and we will do the same. I think we can spend a few weeks here profitably, eh, Barney and Pomp?"

The two jokers were delighted. But Valentine and Benton were anxious to get home so they left by an earlier ship.

After a jolly good time in Rio the party finally went aboard the Utopia, and the voyage homeward was begun. It was a propitious one.

Readstown was reached safely and the travelers were warmly welcomed by their friends. And so ended the trip through the tropics.

But Frank hears from Don Jose and Muriel quite often.

[THE END.]

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